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(54) DEVICE FOR CONTROLLING A GAS EXCHANGE VALVE

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **251/30.01**; 251/33; 123/90.12
(58) **Field of Search** 251/25, 30.01, 251/33; 123/90.12, 90.13

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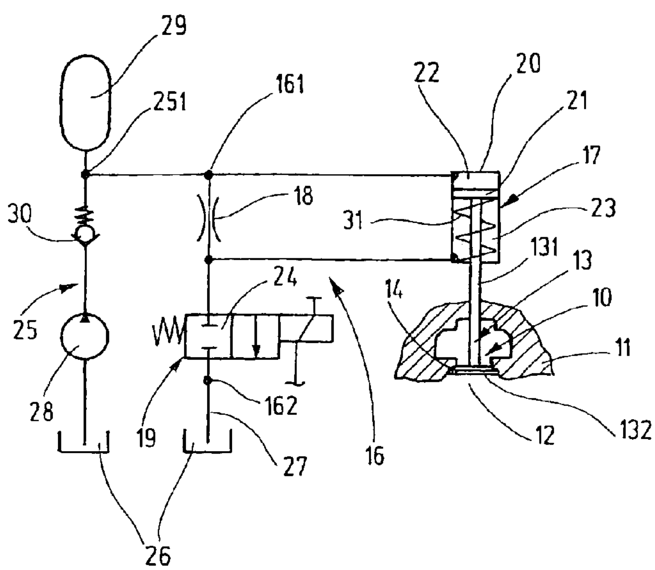
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus for controlling gas exchange valves includes at least one valve positioner, associated with a gas exchange valve, and a pressure supply device which supplies the valve positioner with a fluid under high pressure. The valve positioner encompasses a working cylinder having a positioning piston, coupled to the gas exchange valve, which delimits an upper pressure space for opening the valve and a lower pressure space for closing the valve, and encompasses a control valve controlling the hydraulic pressure in the pressure spaces. In order to reduce the manufacturing costs and electrical energy demand of the apparatus, the upper pressure space is connected directly, and the lower pressure space via a restrictor throttle, to the pressure supply device; and the control valve is connected to the lower pressure space and to a relief line. Depending on the switch position, the control valve additionally connects the lower pressure space to the relief line or blocks it off from the relief line.

11 Claims, 1 Drawing Sheet



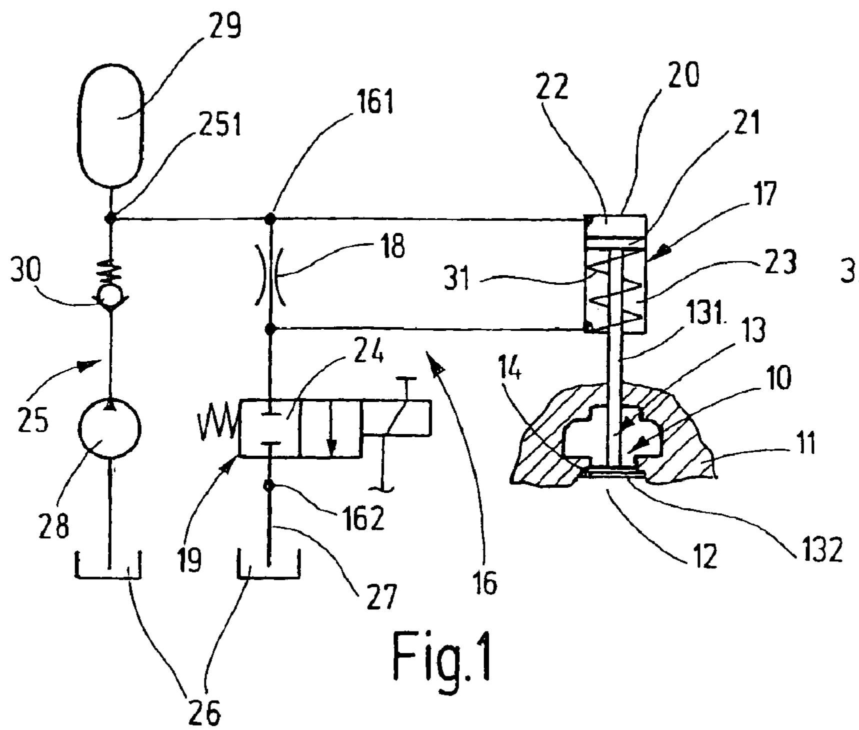


Fig.1

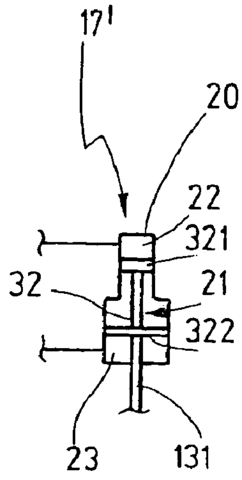


Fig.2

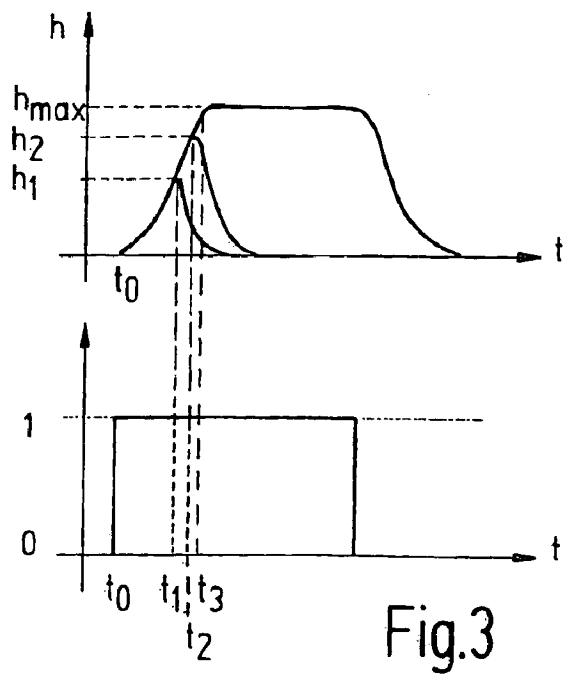


Fig.3

DEVICE FOR CONTROLLING A GAS EXCHANGE VALVE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an apparatus for controlling a gas exchange valve in internal combustion engines.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the apparatus of German Patent Publication No. 198 26 047, the lower pressure space or working space of the double-acting working cylinder, and the upper pressure space or working space of the working cylinder, are connected to the hydraulic pressure supply device via the control valve embodied as a 2/2-way solenoid valve with spring return. The pressure impingement surface or effective surface of the positioning piston delimiting the upper working space is larger than the pressure impingement surface or effective surface of the positioning piston delimiting the lower working space, so that upon opening of the control valve, a compressive force displacing the positioning piston against the pressure in the lower working space acts on said piston, and the positioning piston opens the gas exchange valve. The upper working space is additionally connected, via a second control valve also embodied as a 2/2-way solenoid valve with spring return, to a return line opening into a fluid reservoir.

To displace the positioning piston in the valve-opening direction, the second control valve is closed and the first control valve opened. As a result of the differing effective surfaces of the positioning piston, the positioning piston is displaced downward and opens the gas exchange valve over a valve stroke that depends on the control valve activation duration. The valve stroke speed depends on the magnitude of the fluid pressure or hydraulic pressure applied by the pressure supply unit. To close the gas exchange valve, the two control valves are switched over so that the upper working space is on the one hand closed off from the pressure supply device and on the other hand connected to the return line. The positioning piston is displaced upward by the pressure present in the lower working space, and closes the gas exchange valve.

To hold the gas exchange valve in the closed position after a complete depressurization of the pressure system resulting from a slight leakage, e.g. when the internal combustion engine is shut off for an extended period or in the event of failure of the pressure supply device, an emergency closure spring is provided which is inserted as a compression spring into the lower working space and is braced against the positioning piston. The emergency closure spring is dimensioned so that in all conditions it overcomes the frictional torques in the gas exchange valve and in the valve positioner, and is capable of moving the positioning piston out of any of its displacement positions into the closed position.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The apparatus according to the present invention for controlling a gas exchange valve is believed to have the advantage that with similar functionality, the apparatus requires only a single electric control valve per gas exchange valve. The elimination of one control valve per gas exchange valve not only reduces the number of control valves by half, but also halves the number of power output stages required in the control device in order to activate the control valves.

A considerable savings potential in terms of manufacturing costs is thus achieved, which is significant e.g. in the case of a four-cylinder internal combustion engine having sixteen valves, eight control valves, and eight power output stages. In addition, electrical energy consumption and electrical cabling complexity are reduced. As a result of the smaller number of control valves, installed volume is reduced and the failure probability of the apparatus is decreased. All in all the apparatus is less complex than the one referred to above.

According to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the control valve is embodied as an electrically actuated distributing valve. The distributing valve may be a 2/2-way solenoid valve. In this simplest form of implementation of the control valve, a variable stroke for the gas exchange valve can be achieved only with short opening times, by interrupting the valve stroke. In addition, only the opening time and closing time of the gas exchange valve can be defined.

If the intention is to be able to influence the valve stroke for longer opening times as well, then according to a exemplary embodiment of the present invention the 2/2-way solenoid valve is switched over in cycled fashion, the cycle frequency may be selected as a function of the desired valve stroke in such a way that in the context of a displacement travel of the positioning piston corresponding to the desired valve stroke, the fluid flows flowing on the one hand through the restrictor throttle and on the other hand through the 2/2-way solenoid valve are of identical magnitude.

According to an alternative embodiment of the present invention, an electrically actuated proportional valve can also be used instead of a cycled 2/2-way solenoid valve. In order to achieve the variable valve stroke, the proportional valve is activated in such a way that in the context of a displacement travel of the positioning piston corresponding to the desired valve stroke, the fluid flows flowing on the one hand through the restrictor throttle and on the other hand through the proportional valve are of identical magnitude, and an equilibrium of forces is thus established between the upper pressure space and the lower pressure space.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1***a* shows a schematic diagram of an apparatus for controlling a gas exchange valve in an internal combustion engine.

FIG. **2** shows an alternative exemplified embodiment of a valve positioner in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** shows two diagrams to explain the manner of operation of the valve positioner in FIG. **1**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The apparatus depicted in FIG. **1** in the block diagram serves to control gas exchange valves **10** in internal combustion engines. The internal combustion engine for a motor vehicle usually has four or more combustion cylinders, of which one cylinder head **11** of one combustion cylinder is depicted partially in FIG. **1**. Configured in the combustion cylinder is a combustion chamber **12**, closed off by cylinder head **11**, that has at least one inlet cross section and one outlet cross section, each controlled by a gas exchange valve **10**. Each gas exchange valve **10** has, in known fashion, a valve member **13** having a valve closure element **132**, sitting on a valve shaft **131** guided in axially displaceable fashion, that coacts with a valve seat **14** surrounding the inlet or outlet cross section in cylinder head **11**. By displacement of valve shaft **131** in one axial direction or the other, valve closure element **132** lifts off from valve seat **14** or seats itself in sealing fashion thereonto.

Actuation of gas exchange valves **10** is accomplished by way of an electrohydraulic valve control apparatus that is depicted in FIG. **1** in the schematic diagram. In the valve control apparatus, a hydraulic valve positioner **16**, also called an actuator, is associated with each gas exchange valve **10**. Hydraulic valve positioner **16**, having a hydraulic input **161** and a hydraulic output **162**, encompasses a double-acting working cylinder **17**, a restrictor throttle **18**, and a control valve **19**. Working cylinder **17** has, in known fashion, a cylinder housing **20** and a positioning piston **21**, guided therein in axially displaceable fashion and coupled to valve shaft **131** of the associated gas exchange valve **10**, that divides the interior space of cylinder housing **20** into an upper pressure space **22** and a lower pressure space **23**. Upper pressure space **22** is connected directly, and lower pressure space **23** via restrictor throttle **18**, to hydraulic input **161**. The control valve, which is embodied in FIG. **1** as a 2/2-way solenoid valve **24**, is connected on the one hand to lower pressure space **23** and on the other hand to hydraulic output **162**. A relief line, embodied here as fluid return line **27**, is connected to hydraulic output **162**. All the valve positioners **16** are supplied by a pressure supply device **25** with a fluid, which may be hydraulic oil, under high pressure, for which purpose hydraulic input **161** of each valve positioner **16** is connected to a fluid output **251** of pressure supply device **25**. Pressure supply device **25** encompasses a fluid reservoir **26** into which fluid return line **27** opens; a high-pressure pump **28** that takes in fluid from fluid reservoir **26** and delivers it at high pressure to fluid output **251** of pressure supply device **25**; and a high-pressure accumulator **29**, connected to fluid output **251**, that serves as an energy reservoir and pulsation damper. A non-return valve **30** with a flow-blocking direction pointing toward the pump output is also positioned between the output of high-pressure pump **28** and fluid output **251** of pressure supply device **25**.

The manner of operation of the valve control apparatus is as follows:

Pressure supply device **25** supplies pressurized fluid to double-acting working cylinder **17**. In the static situation depicted in FIG. **1**, the pressure in upper pressure space **22** and in lower pressure space **23** is of equal magnitude. Since, because of the coupling of valve shaft **131**, the pressure impingement surface or effective surface of positioning piston **21** that delimits upper pressure space **22** is larger than the pressure impingement surface or effective surface that delimits lower pressure space **23**, a compression spring **31**, functioning as a return spring and braced on the one hand against cylinder housing **20** and on the other hand against positioning piston **21**, is positioned in lower pressure space **23**. Compression spring **31** is dimensioned such that when the pressure in the two pressure spaces **22, 23** is identical, it holds positioning piston **21** in its top-dead-center position depicted in FIG. **1**, in which gas exchange valve **10** is closed, i.e. valve closure element **132** of valve member **13** sits sealingly on valve seat **14** on cylinder head **11**. Compression spring **31**, constituting the emergency closure spring, also simultaneously meets the requirement for returning gas exchange valve **10** to its closed state when the internal combustion engine is shut off for an extended period or in the event of a failure of pressure supply device **25**.

In order to open gas exchange valve **10**, 2/2-way solenoid valve **24** is switched over out of its switch position depicted in FIG. **1** so that lower pressure space **23** is depressurized because of its connection to fluid return line **27**. As a result of the collapsing pressure in lower pressure space **23**, positioning piston **21** moves downward and opens gas exchange valve **10**. In order to close gas exchange valve **10**, 2/2-way solenoid valve **24** is reset, thereby separating lower pressure space **23** from fluid return line **27**. Fluid under high pressure flows through restrictor throttle **18** into lower pressure space **23**, and positioning piston **21** is guided back, with the assistance of compression spring **31**, into its top-dead-center position that closes gas exchange valve **10**.

The diagrams of FIG. **3** depict on the one hand the stroke h of valve member **13** of gas exchange valve **10** as a function of time t (top diagram), and on the other hand solenoid valve activation as a function of time t (bottom diagram). At time to, solenoid valve **24** is energized and thus switches out of its blocking position, so that lower pressure space **23** is connected to fluid return line **27**. As a result of the decrease in pressure in lower pressure space **23**, positioning piston **21** moves in the opening direction of gas exchange valve **10**. If activation of solenoid valve **24** is terminated at time t_1 and the latter is reset to its blocking position, positioning piston **21** and valve member **13** have then executed a stroke h_1. As a result of the increasing pressure in lower pressure space **23**, positioning piston **21** and valve member **13** now begin to move in the closing direction of gas exchange valve **10**. If, however, solenoid valve **24** is not reset until time t_2, a stroke h_2 is performed and gas exchange valve **10** is opened further. With a slightly longer opening time t_3, valve member **13** reaches its maximum stroke h_{max}. It is evident from this that the desired variable stroke of gas exchange valve **10** can be achieved only for short valve opening times (less than t_3). This is, however, sufficient for most demands in terms of a variable valve train.

If the intention is to be able to influence the stroke of valve member **13** of gas exchange valve **10** for longer opening times as well, i.e. for opening times that are longer than t_3 in FIG. **3**, solenoid valve **24** is then activated in cycled fashion. The cycle frequency is selected as a function of the desired valve stroke, specifically in such a way that for a displacement travel of positioning piston **21** corresponding to the desired valve stroke, the fluid flows flowing on the one hand through restrictor throttle **18** and on the other hand through 2/2-way solenoid valve **24** are of identical magnitude, and an equilibrium of forces is thus established at positioning piston **21** between upper pressure space **22** and lower pressure space **23**.

Instead of the cycled 2/2-way solenoid valve **24**, an electrically actuated proportional valve can also be used. This proportional valve is activated in such a way that for a displacement travel of positioning piston **21** corresponding to the desired valve stroke, the fluid flows flowing on the one hand through restrictor throttle **18** and on the other hand through the proportional valve result in an equilibrium of forces between the upper pressure space and lower pressure space **23**. This is the case when the fluid flow flowing through restrictor throttle **18** is identical to the fluid flow flowing through the proportional valve. With the proportional valve controlled accordingly, any desired stroke of valve member **13** can be set and can be held for an arbitrary opening duration.

The double-acting working cylinder **17'** depicted schematically in FIG. **2** can be used in valve control apparatus **15** instead of working cylinder **17** depicted in FIG. **1**. Working cylinder **17'** is modified in that compression spring **31** is omitted, and positioning piston **21** is embodied as a stepped piston **32** having an effective surface **321** delimiting upper pressure space **22** and a effective surface **322** delimiting lower pressure space **23**. Lower effective surface **322** is made substantially larger than upper effective surface **321**. When the pressures in upper pressure space **22** and lower pressure space **23** are equal, the larger effective surface **322** delimiting lower pressure space **23** causes stepped piston **32** to be reliably displaced into its top-dead-center position and dependably held there, so that gas exchange valve **10** is also reliably held in its closed position. To ensure an emergency functionality, as mentioned above, in the event of system failure or an extended shutdown of the internal combustion engine, a compression spring similar to compression spring **31** in FIG. **1** can be provided, but it can be dimensioned to be substantially weaker and needs to ensure only that stepped piston **32** is held in its top-dead-center position.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for controlling a gas exchange valve in an internal combustion engine, comprising:

at least one valve positioner, associated with the gas exchange valve, that encompasses a double-acting hydraulic working cylinder having a positioning piston, coupled to the gas exchange valve, which delimits an upper pressure space for actuating the gas exchange valve in an opening direction and a lower pressure space for actuating the gas exchange valve in a closing direction, and that encompasses a control valve controlling a hydraulic pressure in the pressure spaces; and

a pressure supply device to supply the pressure spaces of the working cylinder with a fluid under high pressure, wherein the upper pressure space is coupled directly, and the lower pressure space is coupled via a restrictor throttle, to the pressure supply device, and the control valve is coupled to the lower pressure space and to a relief line, and, depending on a switch position, the control valve creates or blocks the connection between the lower pressure space and the relief line.

2. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the control valve includes an electrically actuated distributing valve.

3. The apparatus of claim **2**, wherein the distributing valve includes a 2/2-way solenoid valve.

4. The apparatus of claim **3**, wherein to achieve a variable valve stroke, the 2/2-way solenoid valve is switchable over in cycled fashion.

5. The apparatus of claim **4**, wherein the cycle frequency is set as a function of a desired valve stroke so that for a displacement travel of the positioning piston corresponding to the desired valve stroke, fluid flowing through the restrictor throttle and fluid flowing through the 2/2-way solenoid valve are of a same magnitude.

6. The apparatus of claim **2**, wherein the electrically actuated distributing valve includes a proportional valve that, to achieve a variable valve stroke, is activated so that for a displacement travel of the positioning piston corresponding to a desired valve stroke, fluid flowing through the restrictor throttle and fluid flowing through the proportional valve are of a same magnitude.

7. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein a return spring to load the positioning piston against the pressure in the upper pressure space is located in the working cylinder.

8. The apparatus of claim **7**, wherein the return spring includes a compression spring, located in the lower pressure space, that is braced in the lower pressure space and against the positioning piston.

9. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the positioning piston includes an "upper" pressure impingement surface delimiting the upper pressure space and a "lower" pressure impingement surface delimiting the lower pressure space, the "lower" pressure impingement surface being larger than the "upper" pressure impingement surface.

10. The apparatus of claim **9**, wherein the positioning piston includes a stepped piston.

11. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the relief line includes a fluid return line opening into a fluid reservoir of the pressure supply device.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

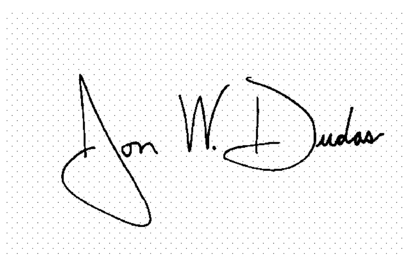
PATENT NO. : 6,857,618 B2
DATED : February 22, 2005
INVENTOR(S) : Thomas Ludwig et al.

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 4,
Lines 13-14, change "At time to" to -- At time t_0, --.

Signed and Sealed this

Twenty-third Day of August, 2005



JON W. DUDAS
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office